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SUBJECT: SSS EJECTS POLCOUNS FROM HILTON HOTEL

1. Summary: On Thursday April 20, agents of Nigeria's State Security Service harassed the Political Counselor as he attempted to enter Abuja's Hilton hotel to meet with a contact. They pushed PolCouns and forcibly removed him from the hotel, but refused to identify themselves. Several local journalists witnessed the incident, which then made headlines in at least two newspapers on April 21. PolCouns sustained no injuries in the incident. End summary.

2. At approximately 12:10 on April 20, the Political Counselor entered the Abuja Hilton hotel for a scheduled meeting with a Nigerian government contact. As he entered the lobby, he stopped to answer his cellphone before proceeding through the hotel's metal detector, which was manned by plainclothes security agents, presumably employees of Nigeria's State Security Service (SSS). Another man, presumably also a SSS agent, crossed the lobby, pushed PolCouns on the shoulder and attempted to take his phone and shoulder bag. PolCouns deflected the man and ended his telephone call. He politely asked to see the agent's identification. The agent refused to identify himself and became louder, insisting that PolCouns surrender his bag. The agent became verbally abusive and shoved PolCouns twice more.

3. PolCouns remained composed through the heated exchange. A third man in plain clothes, presumably another security agent, appeared. The third man appeared to be a supervisor and attempted to calm the situation. However, before a resolution was reached, the second agent returned, accompanied by the man originally posted at the metal detector and three other people (two male, one female). Agent number two began yelling at PolCouns again and he and two other agents grabbed PolCouns by the arms. The group physically dragged PolCouns outside the Hilton and attempted to challenge him again while he phoned RSO and Embassy motorpool for assistance.

4. There were about 50 witnesses in the Hilton lobby and a crowd of spectators gathered while the agents were arguing with PolCouns. At least two journalists and one former minister were part of the crowd. Two Nigerian newspapers published prominent stories about the incident on April 21. The daily "Leadership" made the incident its above-the fold, large-type lead under headline "SSS assaults US diplomat." The paper speculated that SSS harassment of Polcouns is part of a "series of attacks on American diplomats in Nigeria" which they claim is connected to "criticism of the Obasanjo government by senior US government officials." (Note: They cited the robbery of another Poloff on April 15 as part of the pattern of "attacks." Post does not/not believe that the April 15 robbery was in any way connected to this incident.) Interestingly, "Leadership" ran a front-page editorial next to the story about the assault. In the editorial, the newspaper commends "foreigners who have shown they are true friends of Nigeria," such as Senator Barack Obama and John Negroponte. The paper says that "those who are fighting against despotism in Nigeria are also fighting the cause of all sane people of the world."

5. The Political Counselor was not injured and he provided descriptions of the SSS agents involved to RSO. Post will continue to follow up on this incident and report any new information to the Department.

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